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ABSTRACT

Many people hold negative attitudes toward older adults, and these attitudes often are associated with negative behavior toward the old. To explore the behavioral correlates of attitudes toward the elderly, 105 male and female college students, with a mean age of 24.5 years, participated in a two-phase experiment. During phase one, all subjects completed four attitude scales: Tuckman-Lorge Attitude Scale (TL); Semantic Differential (SD); Adjective Checklist (ACL); and Tuckman-Lorge Attitude Scale Revised (TLR). During phase two, those with the highest and lowest positive and negative attitudes (40 subjects) were exposed for a 5-minute period to a structured social situation which involved potential interaction with a 73-year-old female confederate. The interactions were videotaped through a two-way mirror. Following taping, subjects completed the Ammons Quick Test as a measure of behavior and IQ. An analysis of the results of the tests and of the behavior ratings of the tapes showed that only the TL, the TLR, and ACL correlated significantly with one another. Sex was the only demographic correlate of attitude, with more men than women considering negative ACL adjectives as inappropriate for elders. Behavior in the structured situation was only slightly related to general attitudes as measured by the TL, TLR, or the ACL, in that individuals with positive attitudes produced more positive behaviors than negative individuals. The sum of behaviors was significantly correlated with age, suggesting that the older the subjects the more positive their behaviors. Although general attitude scales were not useful in predicting behavior, context-specific behavior predictions might be possible using specific attitude items. (BL)

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THE EFFECT OF ATTITUDE TOWARD THE ELDERLY ON BEHAVIOR TOWARD AN OLDER ADULT[1]

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Running head: Attitudes and Behavior

Abstract

A recurrent theme in aging literature is that most persons hold negative attitudes toward older adults, and that these attitudes are probably associated with negative behavior toward the old. In this study four attitude scales were administered to 105 college students of various ages. One attitude measure (The Tuckman-Lorge) was used to obtain Positive and Negative subgroups which were exposed to a structured social situation which involved potential interaction with an older adult. Results suggested that not all scales measured the same concept, and that greater interaction experience with older adults was associated with negative attitudes. Further, only selected attitude items and not general attitudes were related to behavior in this context. Results were interpreted to mean that context-specific behavior predictions might be possible using specific attitude items. General attitude scales are not useful since "agreement" with an attitude statement seems to mean that the respondent simply thinks it's "possible" but not necessarily "likely" that elders will behave in that manner.

THE EFFECT OF ATTITUDE TOWARD THE ELDERLY ON

BEHAVIOR TOWARD AN OLDER ADULT

In the past three decades theoretical and empirical investigations in the area of attitudes toward the elderly resulted in more confusion and contradiction than clarification. Overall, the generalization was made that adults hold negative attitudes toward the elderly. But, some reports do not agree with this finding. In an extensive review McTavish (1971) suggested several factors that might be contributing to the contradictory findings. Among these were the nature of the measuring instruments used in attitudinal studies and the many interrelated correlates of attitudes.

Measure equivalence

Some attempts have been made to determine how well attitudinal questionnaires of varying lengths, diverse items, formats and response scales compare with one another, and the extent to which they measure the same thing, namely attitude toward the elderly. Hicks, et al (1976) compared five instruments typically used to measure attitudes toward the elderly. The instruments used were 1) a shortened, modified version of the Tuckman-Lorge Attitude Scale, 2) Kogan's "Attitude Toward Old People Scale", 3) Eisdorfer and Altrocci's "Semantic Differential Scale", 4) The Adjective Checklist and 5) the Behavior Preference Scale adapted from Wilensky and Barmack. They found that some of these measures did intercorrelate significantly. However, the maximum variance shared between any two measures in the matrix was only 24%, suggesting that these instruments did not measure a single attitude. They concluded by stating that "attitude" toward the elderly should be viewed as a multidimensional construct, with various instruments tapping different aspects of that multidimensional construct. However, Wingard (1980) did not find support for the multi-dimensional orientation put forth by Hicks and his colleagues, since, in

a re-evaluation of Hicks' measures, greater comparability was found. Schonfield's (1982) results suggested that any general attitude toward the "older adult" is modified by selected exceptions. These would create greater error variance and further limit scale comparability.

Correlates

Besides the theoretical interest in comparing the dimensionality of different instruments, researchers have also attempted to investigate correlates of attitudes toward the elderly. The findings of these studies, while often divergent and conflicting, have provided some insights into the factors that might influence positive or negative attitudes toward older adults.

Age, ethnicity, marital status, sex, and education effects have been reported, as well as effects for amount of contact with older adults. Kalish and Johnson (1970) found a curvilinear relationship between attitude and age with middle-age individuals having less regard for the old compared to attitudes of young and older individuals. McTavish (1971) found age effects within sex, ethnicity, and marital status. On the other hand, no relationships with age were reported by Merrill and Gunter (1969) and Troll and Schlossberg (1970). Conflicting evidence exists concerning sex differences in attitudes toward the elderly. Some reports indicated women held a more negative view and more negative stereotypes than men (Kogan & Shelton, 1962; Merrill & Gunter, 1969; Perril, 1963). Other findings were just the opposite, describing males holding more negative views than women (Troll & Schlossberg, 1970). No association with sex was reported by still other researchers (Britton & Britton, 1970; Traxler, 1971).

Studies that measured educational level and years of contact with the elderly in order to relate them to attitudes provide more consistent results. Young, college-educated subjects had a more positive attitude toward the old

than older people who had not received a high school education (Thorsen, Whatley & Hancock, 1974). Similarly, Gunter (1971) found that the number of stereotypes and misconceptions of college students toward the old decreased as they became familiar with principles and problems of aging. People who frequently interact with older persons have consistently been found to express more positive attitudes toward the older person compared with those who had little or no contact with the old (Bekker & Taylor, 1966; Drake, 1957; Rosencranz & McNevin, 1969).

Behavior and attitude

In recent years, limited attempts have been made to assess behaviors as correlates of attitudes toward elders. Naus (1973), in a study involving college students, compared personal space measures with attitudes measured by the Semantic Differential Scale. While his subjects rated older person in positive ways on the Semantic Differential, the relationship between personal space measures and the evaluative measures was negative. The findings suggested that subjects with more positive attitudes/evaluations tended to assign a relatively greater distance between silhouettes of old and young men than those with less positive evaluations did. Naus pointed out that findings could be interpreted to mean that either no relationship existed between measured attitudes and interpersonal distance, or that those who have positive attitudes would maintain greater personal distance between young and old out of respect, particularly if the old person is a stranger. In another study, Fossbender (1980) found that positive attitudes expressed by high school students on the Old People Scale correlated positively with the behavioral intentions questionnaires, i.e., those who had more positive attitudes indicated their desire to actually interact with the elderly.

Objectives

It is unclear at this point how direct assessment of behaviors, such as verbal and non-verbal communications with an older adult, correlates with the individual's measured attitudes. While there is a general consensus among gerontologists that measured attitudes are indicative of how the individual will interact with the elderly, an objective assessment of such relationships has not been undertaken.

The purpose of this study is to explore the behavioral correlates of attitudes toward the elderly. The degree to which behaviors such as verbal and non-verbal communications, measured in a social setting, correlate with measured attitudes on the Tuckman-Lorge attitudinal questionnaire will be explored. Another purpose of the study is to investigate the comparability of attitudinal scales to determine whether attitudes as measured by these tests are unidimensional or multidimensional. Finally, demographic variables will be correlated with both behavioral and attitudinal measures. It is hypothesized that positive attitudes will be positively related to sociable behavior in the interpersonal situation.

Method

Subjects

One hundred and five male and female subjects in Developmental and Child Psychology classes at Towson State University volunteered for a two-part experiment. Range of age of subjects was 18-55 with the mean age being 24.47 years. The subjects had not yet studied about aging in a classroom setting.

Measures and Apparatus: Phases I and II

Four measuring instruments were used to determine attitudes toward the elderly during the first phase of the experiment: 1) Tuckman-Lorge Attitude Scale (TL) (Tuckman & Lorge, 1953), which consisted of 96 forced choice statements that represented the subject's agreement or disagreement with stereotyped

attitudes toward old people; 2) Semantic Differential (SD) (Eisdorfer & Altrocci, 1961), which consisted of 20 bipolar adjectives on a 6 point scale, used to rate the concept of "Old Person"; 3) Adjective Checklist (ACL) (Hicks, et al, 1970), consisting of 16 adjectives using a 4 point scale indicating the adjective is "very descriptive of most old people" to "not at all descriptive of most old people"; 4) Tuckman-Lorge Attitude Scale Revised (TLR), created by the authors, in which subjects were asked to estimate the percentage of older people for whom the Tuckman-Lorge statements were true. On this measure the same 96 statements used on the Tuckman-Lorge Attitude Scale were used, with the variation in percentage ranging from 0% ("No older people are like that") to 100% ("All older people are reflected in the statement"). Scores could range from 1 (0%) to 6 (100%).

The purpose of the second phase of the experiment was to assess behavior and IQ with the Ammons Quick Test (AQT) (Ammons & Ammons, 1962). A Sony video recorder with tripod, Model V02600, was used to record the subject-confederate interaction during Phase II. Videotapes used for recording purposes were in black and white and could record for 60 minutes (30 minutes duration on both sides). A 19" Sony black and white television was attached to the videorecorder. One microphone was suspended from the ceiling of the experimental room. An additional microphone was used in the recording area and was attached to the videotape machine. The recording equipment was housed behind a two-way mirror which concealed equipment and assistants. A stopwatch was used to time the interaction between subject and confederate.

Procedure: Phases I and II

In the first phase of the experiment a student experimenter approached students in Developmental and Child Psychology classes at the University. The student identified herself and stated that her objective was to ask students to

volunteer for a two-part experiment exploring attitudes of college students toward the elderly. Students were told that following a written attitude survey some volunteers would be asked to participate in the second part of the experiment. A sign-up sheet was used in order to establish a testing schedule for day and evening students. Each subject was administered a test packet consisting of the TL, SD, ACL and TLR, in that order. A demographic information survey was also included in the packet. All subjects were advised that there were no wrong or right answers to the questions and that they should make their responses based on their own feelings about elders. No time limit was set for answering the attitude survey. Following the completion of the survey each subject was assigned a three digit number to assure anonymity.

The data were compiled and correlations (reported below) between measures were obtained. It was decided to assign subjects to "Positive" or "Negative" attitude groups on the basis of the Tuckman-Lorge total scores. Age and sex correlations with the TL were non-significant by *t*-test and Pearson *r*, so subjects at first were assigned to attitude groups without regard to sex or age. The highest and lowest-scoring 20 subjects on TL were selected for the second phase. Subjects were contacted and told they had been selected to participate in the second phase of the experiment based on their scores on the attitude survey. The purpose of Phase II was not fully explained, but subjects knew that an IQ test would be administered.

In Phase II of the experiment, a 73 year old female confederate interacted on a one to one basis with each of the 40 subjects selected, so that correlations between test scores on the attitude survey and attitudes demonstrated in an actual encounter with an unknown elder might be obtained.

There were three areas in the experiment rooms. The AQT testing room, the experimental room proper, and the videotape room where the recording equipment was concealed behind a two-way mirror. Five chairs and stacks of pillows were

set up in standard places in the experimental room, permitting a subject the option of choosing a seat far from, or close to, the confederate who was already present (in an assigned seat) in the room. Chairs and pillows were set at known distances from the confederate. The experimenter informed each subject, upon arrival in the experimental room, that there would be a delay in the second phase of the experiment. Subjects were asked to be seated anywhere they wished in the experimental room for just a few minutes and were thanked for their patience. A sign was placed outside the experimental room asking other subjects to wait outside until called.

Two assistants were prepared to record the seat choice and the interaction between the confederate and the subject through the two-way mirror. Recording began as soon as the subject entered the room. The subject's number was recorded on an 8 1/2" x 11" diagram of the experimental room and an "X" was placed in the chair or pillow the subject used. The stopwatch was set at five minutes and the assistant noted on the diagram when, if ever, the subject began to speak. Each subject was given five minutes in the experimental room to either interact or not interact with the confederate. After a period of three minutes, if no conversation was started by the subject, the confederate was instructed to initiate conversation with a common, "Nice day isn't it?" or; "Are you a student here?" She was instructed not to reveal anything about the experiment and was encouraged to be an active listener if the subject did speak. It was acceptable for the confederate to talk about any topic initiated by the subject. During the course of the interaction the assistants monitored the television screen attached to the videotape machine to be certain the subject remained in focus. Whenever possible the subject and confederate were filmed together. Facial expressions, posture and whether or not the subject started the conversation with the confederate were recorded informally on each

subject's diagram. When there was an interaction, whether precipitated by the confederate or the subject, it was recorded whether the exchange was brief or in depth in nature.

At the conclusion of the five minute interval the experimenter giving the AQT entered the experimental room and advised the subject that it was now his or her turn to receive the AQT. Each subject was thanked for being patient, taken into the adjoining AQT test room and administered the Ammons Quick Test. Following administration of the AQT the administrator debriefed the subject. Permission was obtained for keeping the tape of the encounter with the confederate. All subjects were given the option of having the entire segment erased from the tape, though none did so. Finally, each subject was told that the results of the AQT would be sent in the mail if desired. Subjects were again thanked and shown an exit through a different door so they would not be seen by the next waiting subject.

Results

Results from Phase I concerned the intercorrelations among attitude scales and variables potentially affecting attitudes. Results from Phase II concerned the relation between attitudes and behavior. Respondents also answered a set of demographic questions and questions concerning their experience with elders in Phase I. These appear in Appendix A. On these background questions, respondents can be characterized as follows. The sample consisted of 80 females and 26 males with a mean age of 24.8 years. The number of years of education attained by the group ranged from 12-15 years with an average of 14 years. The participants perceived an aged individual to be between the ages of 61-76+ years with a majority of 32.4 and 31.4 percent perceiving them as falling between the ages of 66-70 and over 76 years of age respectively. At least 97.2 percent of the respondents indicated that they knew an elderly person(s).

However, only 61.4 percent indicated that they spent some time with the elderly. The amount of time spent by them averaged to about 13.4 hours per week. On the question whether the respondents lived with an elderly person, 87.4 percent answered in the negative. It appears that the majority of those surveyed know and interact with an elderly person outside the home or in a social setting and spend time with them at mutually convenient hours.

Phase I

The Tuckman-Lorge was completed by 99 subjects who scored 162.16 on the average (S.D. = 15.32). A maximum score of 192 points indicated a positively stereotyped attitude toward older adults; a minimum score of 96 indicated a negatively stereotyped attitude. So subjects were mainly positive in attitude.

The Tuckman-Lorge Revised was completed by 97 subjects who scored 276.34 points on the average (S.D. = 57.42). A maximum score of 576 indicated that 100% of the older adults subjects knew were like the negative stereotype; a minimum score of 96 indicated that none of the older adults subjects knew were like the negative stereotype. So, subjects were ambivalent in attitude, suggesting that the stereotypes were correct for about half of the older adults they knew.

The Semantic Differential was completed by 102 subjects who scored 79.95 points on the average (S.D. = 4.79). A minimum score of 20 indicated that all negative polar adjectives were assigned to the older adults; a maximum score of 140 indicated that all positive adjectives were selected. Again subjects appeared ambivalent, taking a middle-of-the-road stance.

The Adjective Checklist was completed by 101 subjects who scored an average of 40.39 (S.D. = 2.89). A minimum score of 16 indicated that all negative adjectives were considered very appropriate to describe older adults; a maximum score of 64 indicated that all negative adjectives were considered very inap-

propriate to describe older adults. Respondents were ambivalent in attitude once again.

The TL correlated -.74 (92), $p < .001$, with the TLR, .27 (95), $p < .004$ with the ACL, and non-significantly with the SD. The TLR correlated -.23 (95), $p < .004$ with the ACL, and non-significantly with the SD. The TLR correlated -.23 (95) $p < .01$ with the ACL and and non-significantly with the SD. It appeared that the TL, TLR and ACL were tapping the same dimensions and the S.D. tapping another. Choices of "positive" and "negative" attitude respondents were based on the TL score, considered as a representation of the dominant TL-TLR-ACL cluster.

Demographic variables did not correlate significantly with the scales with the exception of the sex/ACL correlation of .30 (101) $p < .001$. The correlation indicated that men were more likely to say that negative adjectives were inappropriate descriptions for elders.

Questions concerning experience with older adults generally did not correlate with the attitude scales. The first exception was the variable "hours per week spent with older adults" which correlated significantly with TLR $r = .18$ (95), $p < .04$ and ACL $r = -.19$ (99), $p < .03$. The greater one's exposure to older adults, the more negative one's attitude. The second exception was "age of older adult with whom you interacted" which correlated -.42 (20), $p < .03$ with SD, indicating the older the known elder, the better the SD attitude.

Phase II

In Phase II attitude groups were systematically varied and behavior was predicted. The 20 subjects most positive in attitude and the 20 most negative in attitude on the basis of TL were considered the "Positive" and "Negative" groups. Both were given the opportunity to interact with the older adult in the structured test room setting where their behavior could be monitored.

Positives and Negatives were then compared as to behavior. Face-valid behavior variables, which were scored Present (1) or Absent (0), were categorized as: (1) Talked to older adult; 2) Sat close to older adult; 3) Talked without being spoken to first by older adult; 4) Made eye contact; 5) Smiled; 6) Spoke about personal rather than impersonal topics; 7) Faced older adult while talking; and 8) Engaged in conversation more than 50% of the session. These eight behaviors were not mutually exclusive, and for some a score on one category (such as #3) would assume a score on another (#1). Rescoring for reliability approached 100% agreement.

Positives and Negatives were comparable to the larger sample in terms of age, sex, and education. Positives did not differ from Negatives in terms of age, sex or education. The two groups were compared on each category of behaviors using 1-tailed t tests, but no significant differences emerged. Of course variance on the dependent variables was restricted. So, behavior scores were summed across the eight categories and reanalyzed. A trend emerged (t (38) = 1.58, $p < .06$) suggesting that there was a slight tendency for Positives to produce more positive behaviors than Negatives did (M p = 5.9; M n = 5.8). The sum of behaviors was significantly correlated with Age, r (38) = .31, $p < .025$, suggesting that the older the subject the more positive the behaviors. It was, therefore, concluded that attitudes were not strongly reflected in behavior, contrary to the hypothesis, but that personal experience with growing older was reflected in behavior.

Analyses were repeated using only young (age 25 or under) female Negatives or Positives. Results did not differ from the first analysis.

Discussion

The purposes of this study were to compare responses of college students on four attitude-toward-elderly scales, to determine the demographic factors,

if any, affecting scale scores, and to relate expressed attitudes to behavior in a structured setting.

Results indicated that of the four scales only the two which were variants of the Tuckman-Lorge (TL, TLR) plus ACL correlated significantly with one another. On three of four scales, respondents reported both positive and negative attitudes. (The exception was TL, on which subjects tended to be slightly more positive in attitude). It appeared that TL, TLR and ACL tap a similar attitude dimension but one different from SD. Maximum shared variance was 55% (TL, TLR), but a more typical figure was 5% (TLR, ACL), in accord with Hicks, et al's (1976) conclusions.

The only demographic correlate of attitude was sex; more men than women considered negative ACL adjectives as inappropriate for elders. This result agreed with those of Kogan & Shelton, 1962; Perill, 1963; and Merrill & Gunter, 1969. Unlike Gunter's (1971) subjects, these respondents appeared to increase in negative attitudes with greater exposure to older adults. AQT intelligence scores did not correlate with attitude scores.

Behavior in the structured situation was not related to attitudes as measured by the TL, TLR or ACL. The hypothesis was not tested for the SD, but many of the same individuals would have been selected as Positives or Negatives using that scale too. The lack of relationship between behavior and attitude was not due to any unique features of the subsample of Positives and Negatives. Subject's scores on measures of social cognition - not summarized in this report but available from the authors - did not relate to either behavior or attitudes, nor did AQT scores. So, cognitive mediation explanations for the lack of correlation between attitudes and behaviors were not considered further in this study.

The most probable explanation for lack of support for the hypothesis seemed to be that the attitude scales measure several general orientations while

behavior is always context-dependent. The context, in turn, has multiple interpretations which probably differ from individual to individual. Did the subject interpret the older confederate as a "typical" older person about whom they expressed attitudes earlier (on paper), or did they interpret her as something else, a "generalized stranger" perhaps? To what degree did the heightened anxiety of the test situation color their behavioral responses? "Attitude toward older adults" appeared to be a somewhat non-unified concept for both paper-and-pencil test purposes and behavior prediction purposes. This called into question whether any purpose is served by giving the general attitude scales. It is possible that several events in the second phase of the experiment may have influenced interactions with the elder confederate. Subjects were told by the experimenter that they would be delayed for just a few moments. When they entered the experimental room and saw several chairs placed in the room they may have chosen the seat nearest the door since comfort was not a necessity for such a short time. When a subject was shown into the experimental room they were not told there would be someone else in the room. The subject may have felt threatened by the mere presence of another individual. In waiting rooms it has been observed that people will rearrange their body position to put distance between themselves and someone else.

Future research might ascertain whether the subject answered the Tuckman-Lorge and the Tuckman-Lorge Revised aspects of the test packet more from generalization or from personal experiences. It is also important to make a comparison between interactions with older or young confederates to test whether people react the same way to any stranger, regardless of age.

Schonfield (1982) reported that respondents make many exceptions to any generalizations about the "elderly", when they are permitted to do so. In this study, when respondents were permitted to indicate the percentage of older

adults appropriately characterized by TLR statements, respondents demonstrated that "Agreement" with a statement might indicate their belief that anywhere from 51% to 100% of elders are characterized by that statement. This wider range of agreement with negative items differs from the simplistic "general agreement" (TL score) and changes the interpretation of the literature. Although respondents, on the average, "agreed" with 25 of the 96 TL items (average item score of 1.5), on only five items did agreement mean that "at least 60% of elders are like this". Agreement with the negative stereotype seemed to mean that it is true for at least one elder somewhere, that it was possible. This attitude interpretation should lead to less concern for gerontologists countering stereotypes, and should be associated, as we found, with less score/behavior association than expected from the general score.

SD and TLR items in Table 1 correlated significantly ($p < .05$) with summed behaviors and constituted a higher number of significant correlations than would be found by chance. The tabulated TLR results were difficult to interpret. Few related to elder's personality. Perhaps the interaction-prone respondents wanted to believe that elders shared certain values (expressed in the TLR items) that were important to the respondents. The significant SD items, however, suggested that a more positive regard led to more positive behavioral interaction. A preliminary conclusion might be that a combination of similar values and a higher regard for older adults was associated with positive behavior in the test situation. A limitation of this study was lack of data on Negatives' and Positives' behavior in a test room situation with a young confederate present. A continuation of this project addresses this limitation.

In summary, attitude scales demonstrated some consistency, but not total consistency, and were relatively unrelated to background variables or behavior.

The unexpected findings were that greater exposure to older adults was associated with negative attitudes, and that a number of scale items were significantly associated with behavior. Behavior toward an elder appeared dependent upon specific attitudes toward older adults, degree of adoption of these attitudes, and the nature of the interaction context.

Footnote

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Table 1

TLR & SD Scale Items Significantly Correlated

($p < .05$) ($df = 38$) with Behavior[a]

TLR Item	Correlation with Summed Behavior
All Elders ...	
Like to play checkers or dominoes	.26
Have many accidents in the home	.28
Walk slowly	-.26
Their voices break	-.26
Have high auto accident rate	.35
Die after major operation	.25
Expect children to support them	.28
Are most interested in religion	.27
Like to gossip	.32
Object to women smoking in public	.46
SD Item	
Wise (vs. unwise)	.27
Trustworthy (vs. untrustworthy)	.39
Clean (vs. dirty)	.29
Valuable (vs. worthless)	.26
Rugged (vs. delicate)	.26
Understandable (vs. mysterious)	.32
Familiar (vs. strange)	.28

[a] No ACL items were significantly related to behavior

Appendix A

Background Information

Name _____
(Last) First)

Age _____
Year Month Day

Yrs. of education completed (Cirlce One) 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, Other - Specify _____

An old person is (Cirle One) 51-55; 56-60; 61-65; 66-70; 71-75; 76+

Do you know an elderly person/s? Yes___No ___

How much time do you spend with this person/s - hours per week? _____

Do you live with an older person? Yes ___ No ___

If yes, answer the following:

a. How is this person related to you _____
_____

b. How old is this person _____
years